

TAPE INDEX

NARRATOR Mrs. Evelyn Buell

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

PLACE 1101 #247, Buellton
(home)

DATE March 30, 1979

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Interview with Evelyn Merrill Buell, Interview 1
Date of Interview: 30 March 1979; Buellton, California
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: May we begin with a background on your parents?

Buell: You are talking to a woman who lived all her school years in Los Angeles and knew nothing about country life until she came to the Santa Ynez Valley in 1919. A woman who loved the people here and thoroughly enjoyed each new experience in many so amusing. My parents were born in Minnesota but married in Atlanta, Georgia where my grandfather was superintendent of a hospital. An account of the wedding and the wedding dress are on display at the Historical Museum, Jeannette Lyons Room. My father's parents Giles and Elizabeth Merrill lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, where my father was in the real estate business. My sister and I were both born in St. Paul, I in 1898. After my father died when I was one year old, my mother spent the summers in St. Paul and winters in Atlanta stopping in route to visit her sister in Chicago. It was a great thing for us to stay in big hotels and see the big stores in Chicago. When my mother's parents moved to Los Angeles we came out to visit and settled down in the West Los Angeles. My mother was an attractive, red-haired young widow who was very musical. Our home was filled with her friends and cousins and parties were frequent and my mother had many beaux, as they were called. My sister, three years older than I was afraid she might marry one of them so she devised many ways to discourage the suitors, such as singing them out. We would sing all verses of "Mine Eyes have seen the Glory.." with repeats on the chorus of Glory Hallelujah. Usually about this time the suitor was discouraged.

PL: What was your sister's name?

Buell: Ruth. My cousin said Ruth was always getting them in trouble. Another rather stout suitor who brought a new piece of sheet music, the proper thing in those days of

flowers and candy. We loved the latter. This time the song was "Just a Little Rocking Chair and You." He sat down in a little wicker rocking chair and it collapsed. My sister and I were hilarious, he was embarrassed and left.. My sister had a great imagination and wrote plays for the neighborhood children to participate. She was usually the writer, the producer and leading lady. My mother was most tolerant and provided us with refreshments of lemonade and cookies. Productions were staged in our back yard, paying audiences sat on old boxes or boards and tickets were 10¢. One girl brought her little brother who became restless and every time he wanted to get up she would make him sit down again. Finally he stood up and said, "I ain't gonna sit on that nail no longer!" About that time someone's dog ran into the theater curtain which was a couple of sheets fastened to the clothes line all came down and there was a great delay in the performance.

These were the early days of the movies and many of the directors and writers were guests in our home. Also musicians and singers. Mother played the accompaniment.

I remember the San Francisco earthquake that gave us a good shaking in Los Angeles.

Weekends people would go to the beaches, Santa Monica, Redondo, Venice was the newest resort. We went on the red Pacific Electric Car and a man tossed out wrapped orange and lemon drops to the passengers to advertize California citrus fruits.

My little school friend was Pauline Worth, whose grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. B.J. Childs were the founders of the town of Whitter. They were Quakers. Pauline and I were about 10 years old when we would go to Whitter for the weekend. We went on the streetcars and down to the center of Los Angeles and onto the Red Cars and out to Whitter.

I attended school in L.A., Los Angeles High School and graduated in 1917. This was the last class to graduate from the old campus on Bunker Hill. The new high school

was built on Olympic Blvd. In 1919 I graduated from Los Angeles Teachers College. This graduation was the first year that it became a part of the University of California at Los Angeles and was called the southern branch.

PL: Did you always want to be a teacher?

Buell: No, I didn't. But in those days there were not many jobs open to young women and my mother was very opposed to my becoming a secretary. She told such weird tales on that.

PL: What about your sister?

Buell: She graduated from Berkeley in 1917, the same year I graduated from high school. So she became a teacher and taught in Whitter, and Pasadena and then became a missionary and went to India.

PL: You had two years of teachers instruction?

Buell: And then when I graduated my first job was in Santa Ynez. That's when I started here. I came to Santa Ynez in 1919 to teach. There was not town of Buellton at that time. Highway 101 went to Gaviota, to Nojoqui, to the Alisal and to Solvang. In 1925 the new 101 went through Buellton. There was a post office and general store located where Andersen's restaurant is now. This store was owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. William Budd who was the brother of Mrs. R.T. Buell.

PL: How did you get the teaching job in Santa Ynez?

Buell: Muriel Edwards, who was principal of the College School and Miss Eileen McCarthy, who became Mrs. Sam De La Cuesta were the two teachers of College School, but it had grown and they needed a third teacher so Mrs. Edwards came to L.A. and went over the graduates list and asked to interview some of us. She interviewed me at my home. Eileen whose family lived in L.A. came out and we all met together and they decided to have me come. This was quite an experience, I came up on the train with Mrs. De La Cuesta and when we got to Santa Barbara she informed me that she was getting off to meet her boy friend, who was Sam, I was to go on alone to Gaviota, which I did. The wind was howling at this little station. There was a big touring

car and a woman got out with trousers on, World War I type with puttees, her name was Edna Craig and she hoisted the mail on the back of the auto and had me get in the front, through the Alisal and I thought I was going to the end of the world. No houses, no people, so stores, nothing. She drove by the post office, threw the mail off and took me to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sam McMurry, which was the newest house in Santa Ynez at the time. When the car stopped the whole family came out on the porch, that house is still there, they all came out to meet me. They had a fence all around and I could not open that gate. I shoved it, pushed it, and they all standing there watching me. So the little boy, Howard McMurry came down and he just lifted a little prong and it opened and there it was. I learned how to open gates. Mrs. Edwards was an agent for the Santa Ynez Development Company and she went out to make the leases for the company and then she insured all the hay crops for herself. She invited me to go with her after school and I thought how nice of her, but after I opened about 100 gates I decided why I was invited.

PL: You lived with the McMurry's?

Buell: Yes, I lived with them for a year. Mrs. McMurry was so good to me and it was a lovely family. The end of the first year I had met some of the other teachers and we decided, the three of us to rent a house and do our own cooking at our own place so before the beginning of the school year we painted that house all over, it had belonged to the Cunnans, He was living in Los Angeles then. So the day we finished I decided to take a bath and the water, the hot water for the tub was heating in a tank on top of the coal oil stove. The coal oil had leaked into the bottom and it was up against the wall and the whole thing just burned up. We got out a few clothes and things. So then we came back and lived with Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Crabb, the second year. Eileen had lived there. So those were the days of my teaching.

PL: What grades did you teach?

Buell: Eileen had first and second, I had third, fourth, and fifth.

PL: How many youngsters?

Buell: At least 25, three grades in my room.

PL: Did you enjoy teaching?

Buell: Yes, I did. I think that it was a great opportunity for the children to hear about the subjects that were coming on the next year. It was not new to them. They picked this up automatically and if they were slow they had an opportunity to know what it was all about. Lots of advantages to a three grade school.

PL: How many years did you teach?

Buell: I taught there two years and then I was married. Later I went back and taught another year.

It was right after I came to Santa Ynez that I got involved in the social whirl as it was and that's how I met Walter. I met him at a dance in Solvang. He had just returned from World War I. Dances began at 8 p.m. and lasted until 2 a.m. A supper was served at midnight. Young married people brought their children and let them sleep on benches around the hall. The music was all local talent. Then on special occasions we went to Orcutt and to the oil fields that had recreation halls. Santa Maria was a long trip in a Model T Ford. So it was there that I met Walter. I went with his brother Glenn first. So then we went together until 1921 when we were married in Los Angeles. Archie Hunt was best man. That's Bess Hunt's husband. Walter had known him in the war, they were drafted together. Our honeymoon was at the Russian River. Then we moved here to live, which was a house built for the ranch, on Central Ave. now. With money owed to Walter during the war years, he had this house built, by Hans Skytt, and it had one closet, narrow and deep like a tunnel. This was an add-a-room house.

I learned to ride houseback but was never successful at milking a cow. I could get the milk out but not into the bucket.

PL: Where did you go for groceries?

Buell: No electricity at that time, we cooked on a wood and coal

oil stove, we had an ice box and had to go to Los Olivos once a week to buy ice.

PL: Then you did go back to teaching?

Buell: Yes, Eileen McCarthy De La Cuests was pregnant, they lived right across the river at La Vega. I was there for a year and then they built the new school, now the Buellton Post Office.

A little background on the Buell Family. Walter's father was R.T. Buell. After coming to California in Gold Rush days, he was unsuccessful at prospecting for gold he turned to San Francisco where he practiced law, and bought land at Point Reyes. Later he moved to Salinas where he owned a newspaper and was ranching. Then he came to Santa Barbara County where he and his brother, Alonzo, father of Harold Buell, bought a 27,000 acre ranch. Farming, dairying, cattle and hogs were raised, this was their chief occupation. The ranch was self sustaining, it had its own school, post office, store. Later Alonzo sold his interest to R.T. and bought the El Capitan Ranch on the coast. Walter had three brothers, Rufus, Jr., then Walter, Odin, and Glenn and one sister Gertrude, who died during the influenza epidemic in 1918. Glenn, Odin, and Walter attended the University of California at Berkeley, Walter graduated in 1917 and he and Rufus served in World War I. Glenn and Odin, and a half brother Linus operated the ranch during those years. R.T. Buell passed away in 1905 and the will so stipulated that the ranch would not be divided until the last child was of age. But during the war division was made earlier. In 1935 Walter took the Marcelino Canyon portion on Hwy. 246 about 2 miles from Buellton but we continued to live in the house on Central Ave. because of utilities. That came after the new Hwy. 246 was completed. During Prohibition the four Buell boys were permitted to make their own wine, and it was a great day of crushing grapes and later siphoning off the juice, later bottling the wine.

Farming was done with horses. Walter would leave home at 7 with his lunch in a bag, remaining there until 4 in the evening. No mechanized machinery until 1919 on our place.

Hay was raised for our own cattle. There were dry years in 1924, and wet years in 1941 and 1978. When it rained men could not work so it was a time for celebrating. A gallon of red wine and whatever food was on hand. Ranchers would visit and dine with their friends. No radio or T.V. so we made our own music, piano, harmonica, violin, guitar, mandolin. Walter's cousin from Santa Barbara installed the first radio for us. It had ear-phones.

All the Buells were great athletes and sports enthusiasts. They would take their turn at the ear-phone to hear what was going on, especially the U.C. Stanford football games. The sound was unreliable, one moment too loud, or too much static or fade out completely. When the new stadium was built in Berkeley, Walter, Glenn and Odin Buell were subscribers of \$100 each which entitled them each year to the Big Game, USC and Stanford. It was great to attend the Big Game with the fraternity, Delta Ki, Walters, lunch before the game and big parties after the game.

In 1924 our son Robert was born. If anyone got sick at night in those days, the telephone shut down at 9 p.m. there was no local doctor, and someone had to drive the Model T Ford to Lompoc. Get Dr. Heiges out of bed, and by the time you got to the Valley the patient had passed away or recovered. Robert attended Jonata and Santa Ynez High schools. I mentioned that because it was something to get a sick child to Lompoc.

Myrtle Buell's family operated the telephone exchange in Santa Ynez.

PL: How long did it take to make the trip to Lompoc?

Buell: It took an hour to and an hour back. The doctor was not always ready then to come, and there was the weather.

PL: Did Robert have cousins to play with?

Buell: Yes, Odin and Josephine lived right next door to us and Glenn's children lived close. When we were married in 1921 the Buell Ranch began where Andersen's restaurant is on the east, and about where Olivera's Auto Store is to the north. It was a private road from there on to the ranch until 1925.

Knut Moller had a service station on the corner later

owned by Laurence Thompson, where Andersen's Parking Lot is now. Harold Fersley had a tavern and cottages on the west side across from what is now Andersens. Mr. William Budd built a general store and post office on the site of Andersens. Mr. Budd was the brother of Mrs. R.T. Buell. The Budds were joined in partnership with Albert Bodine later, Bodine was a brother of Mrs. Glenn Buell, and a nephew of Mrs. Budd. They sold the store and post office to Mr. and Mrs. Anton Andersen in 1924, who established Andersen's Pea Soup Restaurant. The Budd and Bodine partnership moved to a new location where the Parkway Market is now on the south west side of 101 and 246. When electricity came to Buellton, Andersens had the first electric stove and their little cafe had a small counter and three booths, and it was called The Electric Cafe. Mrs. Juliette Andersen started making her split pea soup from an old family receipe. For the travelers, Buellton became a logical rest stop from Santa Barbara and a place to get some of that good soup that became famous. As the business grew a hotel and restaurant was built going through a series of name changes, called the Buelltmore Hotel. Anton Andersen had come from New York, the Biltmore Hotel before coming to Buellton. He had a brother who had a mens clothing store in Solvang. It was called Andersen's Valley Inn at one time and then Andersen's Pea Soup Restaurant. Across the street to the west another hotel and restaurant was built by Mr. and Mrs. Knudsen, who were the parents of Margaret Nielsen. Then Max Ferslew built another reataurant just north of Andersens.

There was not many national organizations in the 1920's. The local church organizations were the ones people belonged to. The Buellton School parents organization was called the Jonata Womans Club, and they worked actively for the benefit of the school. It was the center of activity for the community. Pot lucks, suppers, regular meetings of the club, plays and speakers on special occasions. I was on the Board of Trustees with Mrs. Wm. Budd, Mr. Giorgi, Mr. Petersen, father of Andy Petersen. I was much younger of course and they were reluctant to spend

any money for the school. A teacher asked for a phonograph so they could have dancing in the yard, and also wanted some swings and other play ground equipment. Mr. Budd would egg these fellows on and say, "Mr. Giorgi, what did you do for music when you went to school?" He would reply "When we wanted music, we whistled!" And what about your exercise equipment? He said, "We chopped wood for the school." The old school was on the corner of McMurry Rd. and Hwy. 246. I taught there, but a trustee at the new school where the Buellton Post Office is now.

During World War II the American Women Volunteer Service was established which opened a large canteen at the northwest corner of Hwy. 246 and Hwy. 101. Each town in the Valley served supper one Sunday evening a month for the servicemen. There were dances and games and the young hostesses were known as Soldierettes. Now those volunteers are known as the United Volunteer Service (UVS) which still operates in the Valley. During the war the Red Cross was very active and we had a strong civilian defence. I doubt that any community was so well organized for the war effort as our Valley.

Progress in Buellton is good and bad, but mostly good. Growth has come gradually, mostly limited by the water district administered by the Buellton Community Service Board. The large ranches are being divided and where there were nine or ten dairys along the river between Buellton and Solvang there is only one that remains. Instead of cattle, horse ranches take their place.

PL: I'd like to ask more about your sister, Ruth?

Buell: She used to come up to Buellton and ride horseback and loved the flowers and plants. She taught in Whitter and Pasadena High School and at that time she decided to be a missionary and in 1926 she went to India. Went under the Presbyterian Church. They went out into the little villages and because she had this flair for the dramatic, she wore the native costumes and they gave bible stories and dispensed medicine.

She was in India for six years and contracted Tuberculosis. She had met an Englishman, a student who was over there and after she come back home because of her poor health, she did recover and went to England and was married there. They had three children, the oldest is Nancy, then Paul, and Michael. My mother and I visited them in 1936, they lived in Northern England and the largest town near was Newcastle. And then just before the war, Mother brought the whole family over here to visit. They were here for the summer and then went back on the last trip of the Queen Mary before she became a troop carrier. My brother-in-law's name is James Jenkinsen, and he could not come to the U.S. until he had a job. He got a pastorphism in a little town in Colorado, near Durango. The family came back and lived there but my sister's health was deteriorating because of the three children and the war experience. So she finally had to go to a sanatorium and died in 1943. Her husband was never able to cope with growing children my sister was the one who took care of everything. I finally got him a job at Midland School and he was happy with Paul Squibb the Headmaster. He could not have his children up there so I kept one of the children and the other two stayed at Gerta Rasmussens in Solvang. But the father was very unhappy not to have his children with him and after two years he gathered up his flock and took off to Pasadena where there were friends that helped him. I had Paul when my sister was in the hospital, he was the second. Nancy went to UCLA and is a teacher, Paul is an engineer and living in Australia, Michael is a free-lance writer of six books, living in New Mexico.

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

PL: When did you first meet Jeannette Lyons?

Buell: As a part of this question, entertaining was quite formal here in the Valley, but not lavish. It was not what you had to eat but the group you were with. San De La Cuesta and his sisters and brothers entertained at the adobe.

I met many of the Valley people there. Jeannette Lyons, who had taught Walter in school, Bess Hunt, Muriel Edwards, The McGillvery Family, who lived in Los Olivos. Their step-mother was anxious to have the girls entertained alot. She started us playing bridge that is still in existance. The members were Jeannette Lyons, Bess Hunt, Barbara McGillvery Phelps, Josephine Buell, Eileen McCarthy De La Cuesta, Dulce De La Cuesta Jensen. Most came for the social times. The De La Cuesta Adobe was shaped like a U, with a court used as a school room, wood stove, just off the kitchen, living room had two love seats covered with horse-hair and wall paper from Spain. Lovely silver and china, and Spanish chests. The chests were made and covered with hide and painted in China.

PL: Do you remember when Hwy. 101 was widened and went straight through Buellton?

Buell: Yes, all the towns people had their business there on the route, paid the state and gave so many feet on either side and moved their businesses back to accomodate the highway. Buellton Motel cut the front lobby off, a great expence. And that was to be permanent but in 10 years they decided to move it again and it did not hurt business at all. It was always the logical place for the highway to the east of the business district.

When I came to the Valley I taught school all week and then taught Sunday School on Sundays.

Odin and Josephine Buell were married about three years after us and they lived right next door. Josephine is a Democrat and she became active in that party. We always got along and respected each other, but one afternoon I was entertaining this Republican Study group and heard a loud speaker come up to Josephine's, on a truck, "Vote for Roosevelt!"

PL: When did you build this beautiful house on the hill?

Buell: In 1959. We had owned this ranch, the Marcelino, and our problem was that we all lived in a common area and the electricity was close. When electricity came down the highway we moved out here. Planned on the view and other things.

PL: Can you tell me a little about Mrs. Emily Buell?

Buell: She was very young when she married R.T. Her husband's son Linus was older than she. She brought with her to Buellton, a mother, father, aunts (twins,) and they all lived near Mrs. Buell. He was crazy about children and the aunts took care of the children. She fed them and dressed them but never washed a diaper, she loved to dress them up. She always had a cook for the house. When Mr. Buell died the ranch was divided up. They had a fire and the big house burned down in 1923. She moved to the bunk house and then built a new house on Central. When you look up Central and see that the houses are irregular, its because we had a view to town and no one could put their house to cut off the other's view. My house is the closest to the road. The old bunk house is where Glenn Buell lived on Jonata Road. Those were very interesting days on the old ranch. When I first came here they had a big bunk house across where the highway is now, and it was made of lumber from railroad ties. The help lived there. Then they came over to eat on the west side.

PL: What can you tell me about your mother, did she come here?

Buell: No, she never lived here, she did not like the country. But she finally married again, the year I graduated she and a widower were married. He had three or four boys and they were very happy. They had a nice car, loved to play cards and never took the car out without taking someone else for a ride. Entertained all the time. A dear man. He liked to come to the ranch, loaded up the car with treats for us. Mother liked to cook. When I was first married everything was ordered in big lots for the ranch. Walter would order a case of canned corn, a case of canned tomatoes, a case of chipped beef. We had our own chickens, but we lived on corn, tomatoes, and chipped beef for a long time. I made biscuits on the wood stove but the fire went out and they were hard. We really had the happiest years in the 30's.

PL: Thank you, Mrs. Buell for this interview.